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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to explore the relationship between a mother working outside the home and the amount of television a child views. It was hypothesized that the hours of television viewed by a child would be positively related to the amount of television viewed by (1) the female head of household, (2) the male head of household, (3) the number of television sets in the home, and (4) the age of the child. Research was based on a secondary analysis of Arbitron Television diary data collected in the Chicago market area (ADI) during February 1982. Final sample size was 735. Results suggest that the amount of television viewed by the child was positively related to the viewing levels of both female and male heads of household, and that children in multiple set households tend to view more television than children in single set households. In addition, findings showed that mothers who work outside the home watch less television and so do their children. Age of the child did not appear to be a factor in how much television was viewed. Findings suggest that researchers should devote increased attention to the role that television plays in the environment of family communication. (DF)

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Children's Television Viewing as Affected by Contextual Variables in the Home

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Children's Television Viewing as Affected by Contextual Variables in the Home

Children's exposure to television has been a topic of enduring interest to scholars from a variety of disciplines. For decades, mass media researchers have concerned themselves with the relationship between watching television and a seemingly endless list of effects. More recently, theorists interested in family communication have recognized the potential importance television viewing as a vehicle for parent-child interaction, socialization and the maintenance of interpersonal relations.

Despite a considerable body of literature on children and television, the vast majority of research has conceptualized exposure to television as an independent variable acting upon family and child (Chaffee, 1980). Relatively little research, however, has assessed television viewing as an effect of family and household characteristics. To redress this imbalance and to clarify the parameters of family television usage, this study investigates the role that contextual variables in the home play in determining a child's exposure to television.

Review of Literature

Television viewing has traditionally fallen within the pale of mass communications research. Studies have, among other things, suggested that exposure to television creates passivity in children and takes away from leisure activities (Rubinstein, Comstock & Murray, 1972; Robertson, 1979), detracts from a child's school work (Morgan & Gross, 1980; McLeod, Atkin &

Chaffee, 1972; Bower, 1973), distorts children's perceptions of reality (Williams, 1981; Rubinstein, et al., 1972), and, under certain circumstances, leads children to behave more aggressively (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs & Roberts, 1978; Rubinstein, et al., 1972).

While such "effects" research is undoubtedly valuable, equally important questions about television's role in family communication have been less frequently asked. As Lull (1978) has argued,

> Television and other mass media, rarely mentioned as vital sources in the construction or maintenance of interpersonal relations, can be seen to play a central role in the methods which families and other social units employ purposefully to interact within their own special everyday realities" (p. 5).

Indeed, the available research suggests that parent/child interaction while viewing may serve as an important focal point for shared activities (Murray & Kippax, 1978) facilitate learning (Messaris & Sarett, 1981; Walling, 1976) , aid in the child's socialization (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Greenberg, Atkin & Neuendorf, 1982; Robertson, 1979) and mediate the effects of exposure to the medium (Buerkel-Rothfuss, et al., 1982).

A common theme running through much of this research is that exposure, per se, is no more important in the child's development than the circumstances surrounding exposure. While the amount of television that children view has been associated with various household demographic characteristics (e.g. Bower, 1973; Comstock, et al., 1978) such correlations offer us relatively few insights into the role the medium may play as a resource in family communication.

Among the factors that might offer such insights, perhaps the most important is the relationship between the amount of television viewed by the child and one or both of his or her parents. Evidence of a relationship between the viewing behavior of a child and his or her mother or father could identify one or the other parent as having a larger role in the child's socialization process. As Galvin (1982) and Lull (1980) noted, communication plays a large role in the socialization function, since it is the medium used to transmit parental and community values to the child. Gecas (1976) found that while parents generally indicate sharing the socialization function, it is usually the mother who plays the largest role in socializing both male and female children.

Thus investigating the relationship between the viewing behavior of the parent(s) and the child, may lend support to the notion that television is a vehicle for socialization (Williams, Smart, & Epstein, 1979; Robertson, 1979; Lull, 1980; Messaris & Sarett, 1981; Buerkel-Rothfuss, et al., 1982), and that one parent (the female head of household) may play a larger role in the socialization process (Gecas, 1976). While some research has indicated a positive correlation between the amount of television viewed by parent and child (Gross & Walsh, 1980; Brown & Linne, 1976; Chaffee, McLeod & Atkin, 1971) these studies have typically relied upon simple recall of viewing rather than a more precise measure of exposure.

Another factor which would seem to have a bearing on the nature of a child's exposure to television is the number of sets avaliable in the home. As Chaffee, et al., (1971) reasoned, the

incidence of joint viewing in one set home, and hence the opportunity for parent-child interaction, might be greater than in multi-set homes. While these researchers found no difference in the mother-child viewing correlations across number of sets (Chaffee, et al., p. 329), Gross and Walsh (1980) have suggested that as the number of sets available increases so does a child's exposure to television. Again, these results are based on after the fact self reports of viewing in relatively small samples.

The relationship between a child's age and exposure to television has been more widely studied. The total amount of time a child spends viewing has typically been found to increase with the child's age (Schramm, Lyle & Parker, 1961; Lyle & Hoffman, 1972a, 1972b; McIntyre & Teevan, 1972; McLeod, et al., 1972; Chaffee & McLeod, 1972).

A finding of age-related increases in viewing may indicate that families use television as a learning resource (Lyle, 1972; Walling, 1976; Robertson, 1979). As a child matures, television may provide him/her with "practical suggestions for social interaction...or at the very least...an abundance of role models" (Lull, 1980, pp. 204-205). Similarly, an increase in viewing may be evidence of parental attempts to stimulate the socialization process. A number of researchers have suggested that television is used by families as a means of conveying family values (cf. Katzman, 1972; Lull, 1980; Buerkel-Rothfuss, et al., 1982).

An important family characteristic which may be associated with a child's viewing behavior is the extent to which the child's mother works outside of the home. This trend is of interest as increasing numbers of women/mothers enter the labor force, perhaps signaling a change in their daily viewing pattern (Comstock, et al., 1978).

The absence of a working mother from the home may impact family communication by decreasing the number of opportunities for parental guidance during the actual viewing period. Likewise, if families use television to "create practical social arrangements" (Lull, 1980, p. 202), then the occasions to use television to "facilitate" family communication are also lessened. This may mean that families containing working mothers may use television differently than families containing female houseworkers.

While some studies have examined the role of working and non-working mothers in predicting when and how much television their children watch (Greenberg, Ericson & Vlahos, 1972; Lyle & Hoffman, 1972a, 1972b; Bybee, Robinson & Turow, 1982) no clear associations have emerged.

This study will explore the relationships amoung these household characteristics and the amount of television a child views, using a more precise measure of exposure than has typically been employed. Specifically it is hypothesized that the hours of television viewed by a child will be positively related to the amount of television viewed by 1) the female head of household, 2) the male head of household, 3) the number of TV sets in the home, and 4) the age of the child. Finally, the

research will examine the association between working mothers and levels of viewing with no aprior expectations.

Methods

This research is based on a secondary analysis of Arbitron Television diary data, collected in the Chicago market area (ADI) during February, 1982. These data which are ordinarily used to estimate local station ratings contain a one week record of the television program selections made in a probability sample of area households (for more information see Arbitron, Description of Methodology).

Four independent consecutive weekly samples were combined to constitute the initial data base for this study. The combined weekly samples produced 1,668 households that returned usable diary information. From these homes, all children ages 2-12 were identified for analysis, resulting in a final sample size of 735.

The diary data report the amount of television viewed by the female head of household, the male head of household, the number of television sets in a home, the age of each child in the home, the amount of television viewed by each child, and whether the female head of household is employed outside of the home. This final variable was coded either working (1) or non-working (0). Children ages 2-12 were the unit of analysis. The number of quarter-hours viewed by each child during the course of a week was regarded as the dependent variable. The remaining variables were used as predictors to build a stepwise multiple regression equation, with forward selection and forward selection with pair switching.

Results

Table 1 is a correlation matrix of the dependent variable and independent variables and their associated probabilities. As hypothesized, the amount of television viewed by children was positively correlated with the viewing time of the female head of household, the male head of household, and the number of TV sets in the home.

Contrary to our hypothesis the child's age and viewing time were inversely related. This correlation however, was not statistically significant. Finally, the results indicate that children of working women viewed significantly less television than children of non-working women.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 2 reports the results of a stepwise regression analysis, in which the independent variables were used to predict variation in quarter-hours viewed by children. To be certain that the model produced by the stepwise procedure was the "best" possible model, a maximum R^2 improvement technique (Goodnight, 1979) was employed.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Four of five independent variables which were examined entered the regression equation. The number of quarter-hours viewed by the female head of household entered the equation on

Table 1

Correlation Coefficient Matrix*

	TVSETS	WORKWOM	QHRSVMHH	QHRSVFHH	AGECHILD	QHRSVCHD
TVSETS	----	-.066 .0171	.123 .0003	.223 .0001	.133 .0003	.151 .0001
WORKWOM	----	----	.086 .0194	-.235 .0001	-.056 .1274	-.090 .0151
QHRSVMHH	----	----	----	.676 .0001	-.049 .1883	.413 .0001
QHRSVFHH	----	----	----	----	.020 .5953	.529 .0001
AGECHILD	----	----	----	----	----	-.021 .5756
QHRSVCHD	----	----	----	----	----	----

* For each correlation coefficient, N=735, d.f.=734. Variable names are defined as follows:
  - TVSETS = Number of TV sets in a household
  - WORKWOM = The presence (1) or absence (0) of a female head of household employed outside the home
  - QHRSVMHH = Total quarter hours of TV viewed by male head of household per week
  - QHRSVFHH = Total quarter hours of TV viewed by female head of household per week
  - AGECHILD = The age of the child in years
  - QHRSVCHD = Total quarter hours of TV viewed by the child per week

Table 2

Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis

Step	Variable	R^2	Cp	B	F	Prob>F*
1	QHRSVFHH	.2796	6.3731	.4007	284.54	.0001
2	QHRSVMHH	.2825	2.6488	.0927	5.73	.0170
3	TVSETS	.2865	3.2889	2.7823	1.36	.2437
4	WORKWOM	.2875	4.2294	1.4429	1.06	.3034

* This study utilized the SAS (Ray, 1982) default value (.5) to determine a variable's entry into the regression model. This is a rather liberal standard, and accounts for the large number of variables in the model. TVSETS and WORKWOM contributed a small amount to the overall predictive power of the model, however, the nature of this study was exploratory, and the statistics descriptive. The researchers believe that reporting as much information as possible will only benefit the reader.

the first step and accounted for 27.9% of the variance. Quarter-hours viewed by the male head of household, the number of TV sets in the home, and the working women factor entered the equation on the second, third and fourth steps respectively, resulting in a slight overall improvement in the models predictive power. This four variable model explained a total of 28.75% of the variation in the dependent variable. Age of the child, which was not significantly correlated with viewing, did not enter the model.

Discussion

This research explored the extent to which a child's exposure to television was associated with a number of contextual variables in the home. As hypothesized the amount of television viewed by the child was positively related to the viewing levels of both female and male heads of household. This result seems consistent with the assertion that a child models his or her behavior after the behavior of parents. That is, children's viewing behavior may originate "from their attempts to behave in an adult manner by following (or "modeling") the example set by parents" (Comstock et al., 1978, p. 191). Thus the child may model the parents viewing behavior, which results in a similarity between the amount of television they view. If television is used by families as a vehicle for socialization, then the mother, whose viewing was more highly correlated with the childs, may play a larger role than the father in the socialization process. Likewise, this may suggest that the mother is more involved in determining how the family will use television.

Further study of this parent-child relationship is needed. What is the specific nature of this relationship? Is modeling,

in fact, an important factor in determining how much television young children will view? Does this parent-child relationship reflect the communication environment of the family? To what extent do these correlations actually reveal instances of joint viewing between mother and child or father and child?

As hypothesized, the data indicate that children in multiple set households tend to view more television than children in single set households. However, the number of television sets in a household is not the best predictor of the amount of television a child views. The explanation for this result may be related to the ways in which the additional set is used by family members. Lyle and Hoffman (1972a) suggested that the additional set often becomes the "children's set" and is primarily used as a means of resolving conflict over program choice between parents and children. Thus, children of multiset home may view more television because the second set reduces conflict in the viewing environment. This may suggest that children of multiset households have more control over their own viewing than children of single set households.

Future research shold more fully investigate family conflict resolution in multiple and single set households. This investigation may increase our knowledge of family decision-making (c.f. Webster & Wakshlag, 1982). It may also reveal the nature of parental control over children's television viewing. The fact that children in multiple set homes view more television than those in single set homes raises new questions about the role second or third sets play in the family's use of the medium

(c.f. Chaffee et al., 1971) and the extent to which joint parent-child viewing might mediate the effects of exposure in such homes.

The relationship between the amount a child viewed and whether the female head of household worked outside of the home was also significant. Specifically, mothers who work outside of the home watch less television and so do their children. Likewise, mothers who work exclusively within the home watch more television and so do their children. This may explain why the presence of a working mother in the home contributes very little to the amount of television viewed by a child in the regression model. The important factor may not be whether the mother works outside of the home, but how much television she watches when she is at home.

As women enter the labor force in increasing numbers, it will be ever more important to understand the mother-child viewing relationship, as well as the father-child viewing relationship. It may be that the father's viewing is more similar to the child's viewing in households containing working mothers. It would be of interest to compare the relationship between the father's viewing and the child's viewing in households containing working mothers and households containing non-working mothers. Research in this area might indicate that in families where the mother and the father both work outside of the home, the father's viewing is more similar to the child's or that the mother and father play more equal roles in determining the amount of television viewed by their children.

Unlike previous research, this study found no evidence of

the hypothesized age related increases in the amount of time a child spends watching television. An explanation for this result may simply be that children's television viewing patterns have changed since 1972, when the majority of these studies were reported.

The data utilized in this study were collected in 1982, a decade since these studies suggested an age related increase in a child's television viewing. It is possible that in 1982, two year olds watch approximately as much television as older children. That is, a child may establish relatively stable viewing patterns very early in life. The finding that children age two are watching about the same amount of television as children age twelve, may also indicate a change in the parent-child viewing relationship. Parents of the 1960's and 1970's may have learned to use television differently when they were children. Thus these differences may manifest themselves in the viewing behavior of their children. On the other hand, parents of the 1980's may have viewed more television as children and have transmitted these values to their children.

Finally, it should be noted that these results are based on a correlational analysis of television diary data. As with any such analysis, caution must be exercised when inferring the causal nature of relationships, and the extent to which the results may be generalized to populations not represented in the sample. Similarly, one should not ignore the possibility that the observed relationships are an artifact of the diary technique. It is possible, for example, that the female head of

household fills out the diary and may not always be aware of viewing by other family members.

Neverless, at present, there is no better method for quantifying viewing behavior. Recall methods must content with poor memory and socially desirable responses, while meter data does not indicate who is watching. In fact, secondary analyses of diary data may offer a valuable and cost effective way to futher investigate many of the questions raised in this preliminary study of children's television viewing. For example, such data provide an unusually precise record of what program content children view, when they view, and with whom they view.

More generally, researcher's should devote increased attention to the role that television plays in the environment of family communication. Such research would contribute not only to a deeper understanding of the day-to-day expression of family themes, but ultimately to the impact of television on the development of children.

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